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INTERPRETIVE REPORT

Venezuela Terrorists Wane

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Since shortly after the rise to power of Cuba's Fidel Castro, and not by coincidence, a band of Communist terrorists called the FALN has been operating in Venezuela in an effort to topple the democratic government.

Over this span since 1959, the FALN has acted more like a Cosa Nostra gang than a political movement. Its members specialize in kidnapping, in arson, in bank robbery, in threats and murder.

Its long-range aim is to overthrow the government of President Raul Leon; its short-range objective is to distract the Caracas government from progressing with economic and social reforms.

The latest exploit of the group—called FALN from its Spanish initials meaning Armed Forces of National Liberation—was the kidnapping of U. S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Smolen. Venezuelan authorities freed the officers after three days of captivity and seized two members of the underground apparatus.

Arm of Communist Party

Washington observers consider the abduction just

officer after three days of another incident in a continuous further moves by the FALN.

Who are the members of the FALN; how strong are they and what do they want?

According to the best information available here, the FALN is the para-military arm of the Communist Party of Venezuela. The party may have 10,000 to 20,000 supporters of varying intensity. The striking force is authoritatively estimated at no more than 300 men.

They have several leaders, some in hiding and some living openly. The brothers Eduardo and Michado are Eduardo and Machado are Moscow-oriented Communists although they are from wealthy, oligarchic families.

Field commander of the FALN is reported to be Alberto Lovera, a lower-middle class Venezuelan in his twenties who has long since gone underground. Another militant leader is Douglas Bravo, who several times has been reported killed.

Two prominent leaders of the FALN now in prison are Pompeyo Marquez, and Teodoro Petkoff, the former field commander with two

previous escapes on his record.

Two Main Divisions

The FALN has two main divisions. One is a quasi-military force in tattered uniforms and operates in the country areas such as Falcon, Anzategui, Portuguesa and Trujillo.

These men are short of arms and money but they have had little trouble avoiding the full-scale expeditions mounted against them occasionally by the Venezuelan army.

The other, probably smaller, force is an underground force in the capital. This group strikes from time to time just to stay in business and to support the doctrine of a prolonged struggle.

The kidnapping of Col. Smolen was intended more for the publicity and to embarrass the Leoni government than anything else.

Smolen was not killed, observers believe, because the Communists find it necessary to keep their movement "respectable" in the eyes of the people.

This desire for respect did not prevent the FALN at one point of dedicating itself to killing one policeman a day. They kept that schedule for nearly two and a half weeks

and demoralized some Venezuelan policemen to the point of resigning.

Their tactics also backfired when they burned a Sears & Roebuck warehouse, not only cutting off a source of arms much in demand by their fellow countrymen but also costing thousands of Venezuelans their jobs.

FALN Reported Losing Ground

Today, cut off from receiving arms from Castro and probably getting little financial aid from abroad, the FALN and the Communists have lost ground and appear to be weaker than they were when they started.

In 1958, it was no trouble for the Communists to send 100,000 people shouting into the streets. Today, having lost the support of the masses, they could attempt no such thing it is believed here.

Castro trained enough of the FALN leaders to let the terrorist organization started but it was aid to the FALN from Havana that led to final severance of relations with Cuba by every Latin nation except Mexico.

Discovery of a large arms cache from Cuba on Venezuelan soil resulted in the OAS mandate that cut off the Cubans from trade and diplomatic relations with the other hemisphere nations.

The major failure of the FALN was its unsuccessful effort to keep people from voting last December. They threatened to kill anyone who voted but 94 percent of the electorate went to the polls.

The FALN in sum, is about as worrisome to Venezuela as teen-aged rowdies are in the United States. They probably cannot be eliminated but they are more an annoyance at this point than a national threat.